

## CLAIMS

We claim:

- 1     1.     A system for accepting and storing items for subsequent  
2     pickup by a commercial carrier, comprising:  
3         an outer housing;  
4         means for weighing an item which a customer may intend  
5     to ship;  
6         means for inputting information relating to the  
7     destination of the item from customer;  
8         control means for calculating a shipment fee for the  
9     item, said control means being in communication with said  
10    weighing means and said information inputting means;  
11         means in communication with said control means, for  
12    accepting identification information relating to eventual  
13    payment from the customer, said communication means  
14    comprising means for receiving and reading a credit card,  
15    means for communicating the charges information to a central  
16    location for billing the charges to said customer;  
17         a storage area defined by said outer housing; and  
18         secure deposit means for permitting a customer to  
19    securely deposit the item into the storage area, said secure  
20    deposit means including a first zone which serves as a  
21    holding space when said item is first placed in the storage  
22    area and a secure zone into which the item is moved for  
23    secure storage.
  
- 1     2.     The system of claim 1 wherein said system includes  
2     means for supplying voice instructions for operation of said  
3     system.

1     3.    The system of claim 1 wherein said means for  
2     communicating comprise a card reader supported in said outer  
3     housing and a telephone line connected to said card reader  
4     at one end and a credit card service center at the other  
5     end.

1     4.    The system of claim 1 wherein said means outer housing  
2     includes means for measuring the item size and inputting  
3     such size into said control means for use in calculating the  
4     shipping charge.

1     5.    An integrated, automated, unattended unit for  
2     collecting and securely holding items for collection and  
3     shipment by commercial delivery services, said automated  
4     unit comprising:  
5         means for weighing the item to be shipped;  
6         means for inputting information relating to the  
7     destination to which the item is to be shipped;  
8         control means for analyzing the inputted information  
9     and calculating the fee for shipment of the item; said  
10    control means further including means for receiving credit  
11    card information and means for communicating and assessing  
12    the shipment fee to the account of the person owning the  
13    credit card, said means for communicating the shipment fee  
14    being by telephone lines;  
15         means for securely storing said item until the item is  
16    collected by said commercial delivery service;  
17         means for storing the inputted information once said  
18    item is disposed in said secured storage means.

1     6.    The integrated, automated, unattended unit of claim 5  
2     including means for printing a hard copy of said manifest.

1 7. The integrated, automated, unattended unit of claim 5  
2 wherein said means for storing said information further  
3 includes means for communicating said information to a  
4 remote location.

1 8. The integrated, automated, unattended unit of claim 5  
2 wherein said means for receiving said credit card  
3 information comprises a magnetic card reader.

1 9. The integrated, automated, unattended unit of claim 8  
2 wherein said fee communicating means includes means for  
3 validating said credit card prior to issuing the shipping  
4 label.

1 10. An integrated, automated, unattended unit for  
2 collecting and securely holding items for collection and  
3 shipment by commercial delivery services; said automated  
4 unit comprising,  
5 means for weighing the item to be shipped;  
6 means for inputting information relating to the  
7 destination to which the item is to be shipped;  
8 control means for analyzing the inputted information  
9 and calculating the fee for shipment of the item; said  
10 control means further including means for communicating and  
11 assessing the shipment fee to the account of the person,  
12 said means for communicating the shipment fee being by  
13 telephone lines;  
14 means for securely storing said item until the item is  
15 collected by said commercial delivery service;  
16 means for storing the inputted information once said  
17 item is disposed in said secure storage means, said  
18 information storage means including means for transmitting a  
19 manifest to a remote location.

1 11. The integrated, automated, unattended unit of claim 10  
2 wherein said fee communicating means includes means for  
3 validating said account prior to issuing the shipping label.

1 12. The integrated, automated, unattended unit of claim 10  
2 including means for printing a hard copy of said account  
3 charge for said person.

1     13. A system for accepting and storing items for subsequent  
2     pickup by a commercial carrier, comprising:  
3         means for weighing an item which a customer may intend  
4     to ship;  
5         means for inputting information relating to the  
6     destination of the item from customer;  
7         control means for calculating a shipment fee for the  
8     item, said control means being in communication with said  
9     weighing means and said information inputting means;  
10        means in communication with said control means, for  
11     accepting identification information relating to eventual  
12     payment from the customer, said communication means  
13     comprising means for communicating the charges information  
14     to a central location for billing the charges to said  
15     customer;  
16        a storage area; and  
17        secure deposit means for permitting a customer to  
18     securely deposit the item into the storage area, said secure  
19     deposit means including a first zone which serves as a  
20     holding space when said item is first placed in the storage  
21     area and a secure zone into which the item is moved for  
22     secure storage and means for conveying said item from said  
23     holding space to said storage area.

1 14. A system for accepting and storing item for subsequent  
2 pickup by a commercial carrier, comprising:  
3 means for weighing an item which a customer may intend  
4 to ship, said weighing means being supported by said system;  
5 means for inputting information relating to the  
6 destination of the item from customer;  
7 control means for calculating a shipment fee for the  
8 item, said control means being in communication with said  
9 weighing means and said information inputting means;  
10 means in communication with said control means, for  
11 accepting identification information relating to eventual  
12 payment from the customer, said communication means  
13 comprising means for communicating the charges information  
14 to a central location for billing the charges to said  
15 customer;  
16 a storage area; and  
17 secure deposit means for permitting a customer to  
18 securely deposit the item into the storage area, said secure  
19 deposit means including a first zone which serves as  
20 holding space when said item is first placed in the storage  
21 area and a secure zone into which the item is moved for  
22 secure storage.

1 15. The system of claim 14, wherein said means for  
2 communicating comprise a card reader and a telephone line  
3 connected to said card reader at one end and a credit card  
4 service center at the other end.

1 16. An integrated, automated, unattended unit for  
2 collecting and securely holding item for collection and  
3 shipment by commercial delivery services; said automated  
4 unit comprising,  
5 means for weighing the item to be shipped;  
6 means for inputting information relating to the  
7 destination to which the item is to be shipped;  
8 control means for analyzing the inputted information  
9 and calculating the fee for shipment of the item; said  
10 control means further including means for communicating and  
11 assessing the shipment fee to the account of the person,  
12 said means assessing comprising means for printing a hard  
13 copy of said account charge for said person;  
14 means for securely storing said item until the item is  
15 collected by said commercial delivery service;  
16 means for storing the inputted information once said  
17 item is disposed in said secured storage means.

1 17. The integrated, automated, unattended unit of claim 16  
2 including means for communicating said account charge to a  
3 remote location.

1 18. The integrated, automated, unattended unit of claim 16,  
2 wherein said fee communicating means includes means for  
3 validating said account prior to issuing the shipping label.

1 19. An integrated, automated, unattended unit for  
2 collecting and securely holding items for collection and  
3 shipment by commercial delivery services; said automated  
4 unit comprising;  
5 means for inputting information relating to the  
6 destination to which the item is to be shipped;  
7 control means for analyzing the inputted information  
8 and calculating the fee for shipment of the item; said  
9 control means further including means for communicating and  
10 assessing the shipment fee to the account of the person,  
11 said means for communicating the shipment fee being by  
12 telephone lines;  
13 means for securely storing said item until the item is  
14 collected by said commercial delivery service;  
15 means for storing the inputted information once said  
16 item is disposed in said secured storage means, said  
17 information storage means including means for transmitting  
18 information that may be used to prepare a manifest to a  
19 remote location.